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U.S. Crisis Unit Takes Up DMZ Killings

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 19—

The United States Government's high-level group that deals with world crises was convened last night and this morning to discuss military and diplomatic responses to the stepped-up tension in Korea caused by the killing of two American military officers yesterday by North Korean guards.

Administration officials said today that the consensus of the meetings of the Washington Special Action Group of the National Security Council was that an outbreak of military action seemed unlikely. But, as a precautionary move and as a warning to North Korea, the Pentagon was ordered to place the 41,000 American forces in South Korea on a more combat-ready status.

On a scale of 1 to 5, "one" being a wartime footing, the American forces were placed on DefCon—Defense Condition—3 instead of the normal DefCon 4, the State Department said. During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, American forces were on DefCon 2 status; during the Middle-East alert of 1973, they were on DefCon 3.

Planes Sent From Okinawa

In addition, to strengthen the American-South Korean air strength in the area, the Pentagon announced that a 20-plane squadron of F-4 Phantom fighter-bombers, had been sent to South Korea from Okinawa and that a squadron of F-111 jet fighter-bombers was being sent to South Korea from its home base in Mountain Home, Idaho.

The United States has about three squadrons of planes in South Korea and the South Koreans have 200 aircraft. But the North Koreans have about 600.

The meeting of the Washington Special Action Group was called late yesterday by Secre-

tary of State Henry A. Kissinger, who is its chairman. It met again early this morning before Mr. Kissinger flew to Kansas City for President Ford's acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention.

The group, an official said, discussed at length the incident in the demilitarized zone yesterday and speculated on the motivation for the attack. All the participants agreed that it seemed premeditated, the official said.

"Frankly, we're a bit baffled," another official said afterward.

At the meetings George Bush, the Director of the Central Intelligence, provided the latest data on the situation and a participant said there was no evidence of any North Korean military movements toward the South Korean border.

Lacking such information, the sessions became more a discussion group, an official said, without a sense of imminent conflict. As a result, Mr. Kissinger went ahead with plans to go to Kansas City, where Brent Scowcroft, Mr. Ford's adviser for national security, had gone with Mr. Ford earlier in the week. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld remained on vacation but planned tonight to go to Kansas City for the speeches, with other Cabinet officers.

Deputy Defense Secretary William P. Clements Jr. represented the Defense Department at the Washington group and Adm. James L. Holloway, Director of Naval Operations, participated for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In addition to the bolstering of American military strength in Korea, Mr. Kissinger called in Huang Chen, the head of the Chinese liaison mission, to discuss the Korean developments.

An official said that Mr. Kissinger repeated the American

proposal to hold peace talks involving the two Koreas, China and the United States, to end permanently the situation caused by the Korean War of 1950-53, which ended with a truce that is still in effect, and a divided Korea.

Mr. Kissinger was also said to have told Mr. Huang of the American concern over the killing of the two officers and asked that China use its contact with North Korea to make sure such incidents are not repeated.

American intelligence analysts have noticed an unusual amount of activity in North Korea in recent weeks aimed at persuading the world that the United States and South Korea were planning an invasion of the North. On Aug. 5, for instance, the North Korean government issued a lengthy statement claiming that South Korea and the United States "have now finished war preparations and are going over to the adventurous machination to directly ignite the fuse of war."

South Koreans in Washington speculate that the North Koreans stirred up a crisis for domestic reasons, among them a poor economy and an inability to pay interest on foreign debt.

Another possible domestic problem has been caused by the decision of Prime Minister Kim Il Sung of North Korea earlier this year to name his son, Kim Jong Il, as the No. 2 man in the country's Communist Party, and as his heir-apparent. This was said to have aroused resentment among Communist officials and military men who opposed the move as nepotism. But this is largely speculation, since information on North Korean internal affairs is in short supply here.

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